

Aussie rules

What's it like to be in charge of the golf course on the Marquess of Lansdowne's Estate on Grade One Listed parkland designed by Capability Brown? It's all in a day's work for Jaey Goodchild as Steve Castle discovered

PROFILE

Name: Jaey Goodchild
Born: Brisbane, 5 December 1976
Hobbies: Kayaking, running
Favourite Sports Team: The Wallabys



Arriving at the Bowood Estate, which lies a few miles west of Chippenham in Wiltshire, felt like accidentally stumbling across the set of ‘Downton Abbey’ – and I half expected to be summoned for afternoon tea by the Marquess.

The spectacular 4000 hectare site boasts a famous Rhododendron Walk, a secret garden and an 18th century House. The proprietor is Charles Maurice Petty-Fitzmaurice, the 9th Marquess of Landsdowne – Bowood has been his family’s home for nearly 300 years. But my visit concentrated on the serious work that’s been taking place on the superb golf course.

Brisbane-born Jaey Goodchild is Head Greenkeeper at Bowood Golf and Country Club which covers around 200 acres of the huge site. It’s 18 holes of glorious parkland and a former Challenge Tour venue which measures an intimidating 7,309 yards from the blue tees and 6,878 from the white.

Jaey said: “It’s picture postcard stuff – just what you would expect one of Capability Brown’s works to be. But it’s very much a working Estate - there’s a gamekeeper and a sawmill with on-site carpenters. In fact the wooden posts for our yardage signs have been sourced from seasoned oak felled on site.”

Jaey came to Bowood in 2011, and his immediate aim was to improve the USGA greens which at that time had a high thatch content and high incidence of disease. When the team used to core, the greens suffered major pull-ups due to the lack of surface stability. The sward was weak with minimal rooting and they would spend hours repairing the greens after aeration.

“My first big challenge was convincing the proprietor, committee and members of the importance of curing this and find a way to fit it in to the schedule. This was difficult in the first year because I started in March when most of the year’s business had already been booked. So year one had to be a real ‘little and often’ approach to keep things ticking over with plenty of fine aeration and light topdressing.

“We schedule two hollow tining operations per year plus multiple micro solid tines and winter slitting. Last year we aerated the greens 14 times and always follow up with a light topdress, brushing and rolling to get the surfaces back on track.

“We’re giving the roots the opportunity to develop, bind the sward together and strengthen it. Now we’ve every confidence we’ll have zero pull-up when we aerate.



We've kept it simple – get the air in there and get the sand in there, little and often, and we haven't tried anything too fancy. We're at a point now where we can aerate, roll and have play that day and golfers don't even notice we've done it."

Bowood had 940mm rainfall last year, 20% more than average, and the renovated greens stood up well remaining largely firm and dry. But the moisture did lead to more problems with disease.

"We had Fusarium in July which you would never expect, quickly followed by Anthracnose, so managing two diseases in such a short space of time made it a tough year. Even this year the Fusarium has been lingering because of the humidity – not so much that you take action but definitely enough to keep an eye on."

The greenkeeping team comprises of nine full-time staff plus some seasonals through the summer. This includes one mechanic – however he's kept busy with jobs on the rest of the Estate as well as maintaining the greenkeeping team's fleet. There are also eight gardeners looking after the spacious gardens, arbo-

retum, the Rhododendron visitor centre, adventure play park and the myriad other attractions on site. So how does Jaey ensure that the greenkeeping team's work is integrated with the rest of this large commercial operation?

"We plan a year in advance. If we want to do renovation work in the spring I book it in the previous August and all our customers are made aware of it in good time. We have a members liaison committee who I address on a regular basis. I always start off with the weather followed by a course report, then I update them on upcoming work on the course and we finish things off with a Q&A. I report to both the Hotel Manager and the Estate Manager, and subsequently to the Marquess, but on a daily basis I work very closely with the Hotel Manager and Head Pro."

In common with my recent features on larger courses with budgets to match, Jaey realises he is fortunate to be able to call on the services of a greenkeeping team nudging double figures.

He said: "It's only possible to keep to the 'little and often' plan on this site if you have a decent sized

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team, and I'm fortunate to be in that position. We've also invested in new machinery which has cut the time it takes to complete these key tasks.

"The key piece of kit for me is the Wiedenmann Terra Spike GXi 8. The old machine was only 800mm wide so it took a long time to do the job! The Wiedenmann's speed and versatility make it crucial, and it's got all the bells and whistles – it does whatever you want it to do. We also use a Sisis multislit that can buzz round a hectare of greens in a couple of hours – that's vital because we've got a hectare and a half of green surface."

The course itself is undulating, with long rough (almost reminiscent of some links courses) punishing errant drives. It looked picturesque in the summer sun, with a young

ABOVE: Harvested rough bailed and ready for removal

MAIN RIGHT: The team at Bowood - Jack Summers, Lee Whyte, Zac Broocks, Matt Law, Franzi Iten, Sam Day, Jaey Goodchild



MACHINERY LIST

Greens

- Jacobsen Eclipse 322
- Tru-turf roller

Surround mowing

- Jacobsen GP400
- 2 x Jacobsen Gplex 3
- 2 x Jacobsen LF3800
- Jacobsen AR522
- Ransomes HR6010
- Ransomes 960

Aeration

- Wiedenmann GXi8
- Vertidrain 7212
- Vertidrain 305
- Sisis multi slit
- Dowdeswell slitter

Bunker rake

- Smithco Superstar

Spraying

- Hardi 6m truck mount
- Hardi 12m tractor mount

Debris clearance

- Tornado XL360
- Amazone GHS210
- Ryan core collector

Utility vehicles

- 3 x Toro HDX Workman
- Cushman
- Kawasaki Mule
- Easi-go

Topdressing

- Ultra spreader topdresser
- Toro 1800 topdresser

Extras

- Bernhard Grinding Equipment Express Dual 2000, Angle Master 2000
- Groundman sodcutter

deer skittering down one of the fairways as we drove round. With the team now in control of the USGA greens, they've been able to focus on management of the long rough.

Jaey explained: "We've got a massive amount of the stuff. We cut and collect annually at the end of every season, and we're gradually scarifying to thin out the heavy play areas.

The hardest part is finding the balance between aesthetics, economics and speed of play. There's a lot of arguing – sorry, I mean cooperation between myself and the pro Paul McLean on this! We spend a lot of time together every spring on cut lines, watching play and managing it all."

Jaey first arrived on these shores in December 1997 on a six-month backpacking trip - and has stayed ever since! His first job in the UK was landscaping at Hyde Park for two years. This involved spending many hours with the Park's fine turf specialist which convinced him that was the path he wanted to follow.

His first golf role was at Chobham in Surrey as an Assistant, before moving up to a Deputy role after



only 18 months. Two years later he secured a role at The Richmond as a Deputy. All of his turf education was in the UK. He attended afternoon and evening classes at Merrist Wood to obtain a HNC & HND, before completing his Masters Degree in Sports Surface Technology at Cranfield University – a total of seven years of part-time study. He's been a BIGGA member for 11 years, and is also a Silver Key member. Why?

"BIGGA's education programme has opened so many doors for me over the years so it's good to give a bit back. Most of the guys here

are BIGGA members and I try and get them to attend as many events as possible – seminars, golf days, BTME - rotating them so they all get a chance.

"I've been a regular member of the BMW PGA Support Team at Wentworth and also The Open this year for the first time – these are fantastic opportunities – there's such a buzz when you're working at a tournament."

In a disappointing sporting summer for Australia (sorry Jaey, I couldn't resist...) it's pleasing to see one Antipodean enjoying success in the UK.